

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 001691

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: COVERAGE OF NATIONALITY LAW SHOWS WEAKNESS OF CONGOLESE MEDIA

1. (U) Summary. The Congolese media's coverage of draft nationality and amnesty laws has shown the limits of entities that lack independence, resources, and professionalism. The directors of Tropicana Television, and the more reputable daily newspapers La Referance Plus and Le Potentiel, acknowledge the weaknesses of the Congolese media and indicate that poverty, lack of professional training of journalists, fear of controversy, manipulation by extremists, and interference by media owners, political patrons and the government, account for the absence of a real debate on the issues of nationality and amnesty. Meanwhile, anti-Tutsi rhetoric continues to surface sporadically on television talk shows, newspapers, and workshops on nationality organized by NGOs. End Summary.

Lack of Resources and Independence Limits Media Coverage

2. (SBU) On August 16, Poloff met with Kibambe Tshintwa, the Director of Tropicana Television, and owner of Numerica, a privately owned television station and daily newspaper, respectively, to discuss media coverage of a draft nationality law currently being considered by Parliament. Tshintwa acknowledged the serious shortcomings of the

SIPDIS

Congolese media and said that it was difficult to provide good coverage of important issues such as the nationality law. In his view, the main problem is poverty. Congolese journalists are not always paid and when they are paid, their salaries are very low. When a journalist is sent to cover a story, he will give preference to whomever pays. Additionally, journalists are easily intimidated to either cover or refrain from covering stories.

3. (SBU) Tshimwa said that there are too many television stations and daily newspapers in Kinshasa and not enough advertising to make ends meet. Some media outlets are owned by individuals who have direct ties to political figures with particular agendas and others make themselves available to those who can pay for access. Very few have the necessary resources to remain independent and to strive for objective coverage of events and issues. Lack of resources also affects professional training of journalists as many people simply start working for media outlets without any prior academic background.

4. (SBU) According to Tshimwa, in the politically charged and polarized environment of the Congo, it is difficult to be seen as neutral. He said that ever since the Mobutu-Tshisekedi media split of 1990, when each leader supported different media entities, most people have come to distrust the media and to assume that each outlet represents a particular interest. Tshimwa indicated that when he interviews Vice-President Ruberwa, supporters of President Kabila accuse him of having been "bought" by Ruberwa.

5. (SBU) Tshimwa noted that people are afraid to discuss sensitive issues like nationality or amnesty in an honest or open manner that could be seen as pro-Banyamulenge. Although Tshimwa claims that his television station tries to maintain

SIPDIS

a balanced approach on the nationality law, he could not point to any examples of guests on his programs who have advocated a generous and "modern" approach to nationality. At a personal level, he said that he agreed with new laws that would bring peace and organization to the DRC, including a nationality law that would be inclusive. Tshimwa said that there is no official censorship of the media, but that people practice "self-censorship" according to perceived interests. The National Congolese Radio and Television (RTNC) is an example of a television station where programs such as "The Media Forum" invite guests who share the same pro-government views to debate issues like nationality, thus avoiding any controversy.

Editor of La Reference Plus: Not Enough Debate

6. (SBU) Poloff met August 17 with Ipakala Mobiko, the director of the Kinshasa daily newspaper La Reference Plus, to discuss newspaper coverage of draft nationality and amnesty laws. Mobiko said the media reflects the disorganized

state of society in the Congo. He noted that instead of a real debate within society or the media the voices that are often heard are those of extremists.

17. (SBU) Mobiko claimed he has tried to publish balanced articles on nationality that call for reflection, maturity and inclusion. As an example, he referred to an article published by his newspaper on August 9th, in which the government was criticized for its approach to nationality. (Note: The article in question does in fact call for a more realistic approach to dual nationality, for the integration of immigrants and for the education of the Congolese public to address xenophobic attitudes. End Note.) However, he acknowledged that there are very few credible newspapers in the country and that most lack the independence needed to truly inform the public and generate healthy debates on key issues like nationality.

18. (SBU) According to Mobiko, newspapers are a better medium to address issues in greater depth than either television or radio. However, he acknowledged that they are beyond the financial means of most Congolese. (Note: La Reference Plus costs USD 0.70 in Kinshasa and USD 0.85 in the provinces. End Note.) Mobiko noted that his newspaper circulates in major cities throughout the Congo, but delivery is contingent on flights, which are not always reliable. One creative way in which Congolese do access newspapers is by reading them while displayed in street corners or by making photocopies of interesting articles and circulating these copies.
Editor of Le Potentiel: Journalists are Manipulated

19. (SBU) On August 26, Poloff met with Modest Mutinga, director of the daily newspaper Le Potentiel, and President of the High Media Authority (Note: This is a civilian entity created under the peace accords to serve as "referee" on media independence, particularly with respect to the electoral process. End Note.) Le Potentiel, and La Reference Plus are perhaps the most reputable newspapers in Kinshasa. However, there are over twenty other daily newspapers that are distributed around the city and most are unreliable and lack serious content.

110. (SBU) According to Mutinga, the public media in the Congo has always existed to serve the power structure. Although in theory the media have now been liberalized, in reality little has changed. In his view, the Ministry of Information still does not understand that it should not interfere with the editorial line of public media. The private and commercial media's editorial lines are usually imposed by businessmen with political interests or by politicians. Thus in most cases, independence is severely compromised by financial and political dependence.

111. (SBU) Mutinga said that the Congolese media was ill prepared to educate and sensitize the public about issues such as nationality and amnesty. In his view, the nationality question had already been addressed by the Lusaka Accords and the overall objective was peace and reconciliation. However, this view is not shared by others, especially people from eastern cities such as Bukavu, whose passionate views have been prominently featured in the media. (Note: Civil society members from Bukavu and Kisangani who discuss nationality issues have expressed strong distrust of Congolese Tutsis whom they typically referred to as "Rwandans". End Note.) In terms of the amnesty law, Mutinga noted the media was reluctant to deal with this very controversial issue, because it involves people sentenced in the assassination of the current president's father.

Hard-liners Dominate Debate

112. (U) During the month of August, Poloff participated in two workshops that addressed the nationality issue. One was organized by Journalists in Danger (JED) and the other by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Global Rights. During both fora, journalists and civil society representatives who expressed xenophobic attitudes towards Tutsis spoke freely and openly and comprised the majority of those who made public statements. The few individuals who called for a more tolerant and inclusive approach were immediately interrupted and criticized. A woman at the NDI workshop who openly challenged the notion that under Rwandan law, Congolese Tutsis could not acquire Congolese citizenship, was booed and later told poloff she had been threatened by one of the participants. Jackie Bisimwa, a member of parliament from the political opposition sitting behind poloff, kept interrupting the woman loudly saying "We are not in Rwanda; let them go back". (Note: In private conversations Bisimwa presents a more moderate perspective. End Note.)

Comment

113. (U) At a private level, the directors of some of the most

reputable media outlets in Kinshasa acknowledged candidly the serious shortcomings of the Congolese media and the lack of a real debate on the proposed draft nationality and amnesty laws. In an increasingly intolerant climate, in which a recent article in The Economist estimated 80% of Congolese think that Tutsis are not Congolese, it is very unlikely that most media entities would publish or broadcast the views of those calling for nationality and amnesty laws that are "modern", moderate, and generous. Instead, under the cover of "patriotism", the Congolese public has been presented with a vast array of television guests and newspaper articles referring to the danger posed by Rwanda, questioning the loyalty of Congolese Tutsis, and asserting that Banyamulenges constitute a threat.

MEECE